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ABSTRACT

Outdoor activities in residential programs aim to promote personal growth and to develop a healthy personality in troubled youth for whom other interventions have been unsuccessful. In the Netherlands, experiential outdoor programs consist of activities such as mountain climbing and rapelling, flat and white water canoeing, biking, sailing, caving, trekking and camping. The activities are used for a diversity of special populations such as adolescents with behavior disorders, drug addicts, youngsters with criminal records or psychiatric problems, and disabled young people in wheelchairs. In the experiential process, facilitators assess basic aims and needs with the youngster and establish basic rules. The experiential environment is composed of a small group of people and challenging surroundings. The youngsters start with a task in which abilities are needed that fit into the framework of meeting assessed needs. Preprocessing accelerates the outcome, which can range from failure to mastery. The group evaluates the process and may generalize the results. The results of the evaluation set the tone for the next new task. When a youngster builds a stock of experiences, he may step into real life with a set of self-rewarding, problem-solving strategies. An intensive program is being developed in the Czech Republic for more severely troubled youth, in which youth are heavily involved in the development of a campground, hotel, and restaurant. The youngsters will then return to a group home in Amsterdam for about 3 months. Experiential learning will be central to both phases. (KS)

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Outdoor Experiential Education in residential treatment centres

Methodological approach and the Czech experiment

Presentation

BY

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and

Bart Keus
(SAC (Amsterdam))

at the

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BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Ton Duindam and Bart Keus are working in residential youth treatment facilities in the Netherlands and utilising outdoor experiential education.

Bart is working in Amsterdam in a department of the Social Agogic Center. The Social Agogic Centre is one of the three big treatment facilities for youth care in Amsterdam. Bart runs the homes for adolescents with the experiential methodology and is the stafmember for the implementation of this methodology into other parts of our organisation. Besides that he is the secretary of SPEL, a national organisation for the development and implementation of experiential education in youth care. For the last 20 years he ran several projects with younsters, ranging from survival tours to labour projects. At this moment ha and some collegues are starting a brand new project that is located in Czecia.

Ton Duindam is an orthopedagogue, that is something like a clinical child psychologist. He has been working with adolescents for the last 16 years. He is working at the orthopedagogic center 'Michiel' and activily involved with outdoor experiential programs since 1988.

Notifying that experiential education in treatment centers in our country lacked of theoretical background, he spent some time in finding out why people do activities, what should be done to make activities work more consistantly and how they may be of infuence in the therapeutic process. This resulted for him in a connection with the Association for Experiential Education in the USA, the German Bundesverband für Erlebnispädagogik and the National Association of outdoor education in the UK. Important for our country is the connection with the American organisation 'Project Adventure' with whom I organise international workshops Adventure Based Counseling. Through SPEL he got involved in writing a manual on the use of experiential outdoor education in youth care in our country.

Preparing for this conference I started thinking about our two countries and resemblances between the Czechian and the Dutch people and I concluded that both our people are and have been industrious and always seeking for personal freedom.

A few days ago, before 324 years, at the 22nd of november 1670, Jan Amos Komensky, the famous Czechian educator was buried in Naarden, a small and nowadays still charming fortified city in the Netherlands near Amsterdam. Komenskys grave was forgotten over the years and only rediscovered in 1871. At the 25th of july 1929, his mortal remains were solemny reburried in Naarden. This is a picture of the mausoleum that was opened in Naarden in 1937. (Oosterhuis 1938)

Although I never read about Komensky or Comenius, as he is called according to the lingua franca of his days, I think that it is worth to look for the value he still has as an important historical founder of experiential education. He was an educator who should be remembered when we are speaking

about outdoor activities and the use of outdoor activities in experiential education.

It is one of Komenskys great merits, that he pointet out the value of nature for education and the necessity of observational education. Putting into practice the benefits of the modern technics in his days, bookprinting, he came to the principles of cooperative learning. He was also clear about stepwise education and pleaded for the education of everyone, the rich, the poor, the bright, the dull and as well men as women.
These principles written down in Didactica Opera Omnia (1627) and Scola ludus (1656) are of a valuable brightness and still inspiring today.

Before speaking about outdoor activities as such, it is wise to tell something about residential youth care in the Netherlands. This will be in even less than a nutshell.

When youth gets in trouble, that is gets in trouble at home, with the parents, or at school, or in the streets, there are several ways people are able to be helped through support and advise. In most occasions the parents seek help or are told to do so. A small group doesn't succeed to manage life with this help and some younsters of these families are tranferred to residential treatment centers. The intensity of the approach ranges along with the problems.
Most children and youngsters in residential care facilities visit school and are brought up in a home like group setting. (there is by the way a strong movement in our country to prevent for placement outside the family-home situation).

It is in this environment of residential treatment, that we want to place our outdoor activities. We want to use outdoor activities to promote personal growth and to develop a healthy personality.

In the Netherlands experiential outdoor programms have become populair in the past 15 years. Programs are known as survival training and trekking expedition and are consisting of activities like: mountain climbing and rapelling, flat and white water canoeing, biking, sailing, caving, trekking and camping. The activities are used as treatment modality for a diversity of special populations such as adolescents with behavior disorders, drugs addicts, youngsters with criminal records or psychiatric problems and disabled young people in wheelchairs. Sometimes programs are done when nothing else helps, as a last 'life saver', in other situations used as catalyser or to enrich an other program. As diverse as the populations, is the diversity in programs, roots, philosophy and used methods.

Over the last few years we see a growing interest in youth care institutions to combine these adventure activities with labour projects. There is also a growing interest in integrating experiential learning methods in the daily routines. In doing so, special projects become more an integrated part of the whole treatment planning.

The purpose of the outdoor experience is to discover and unfold talents and character. Although not theoretically

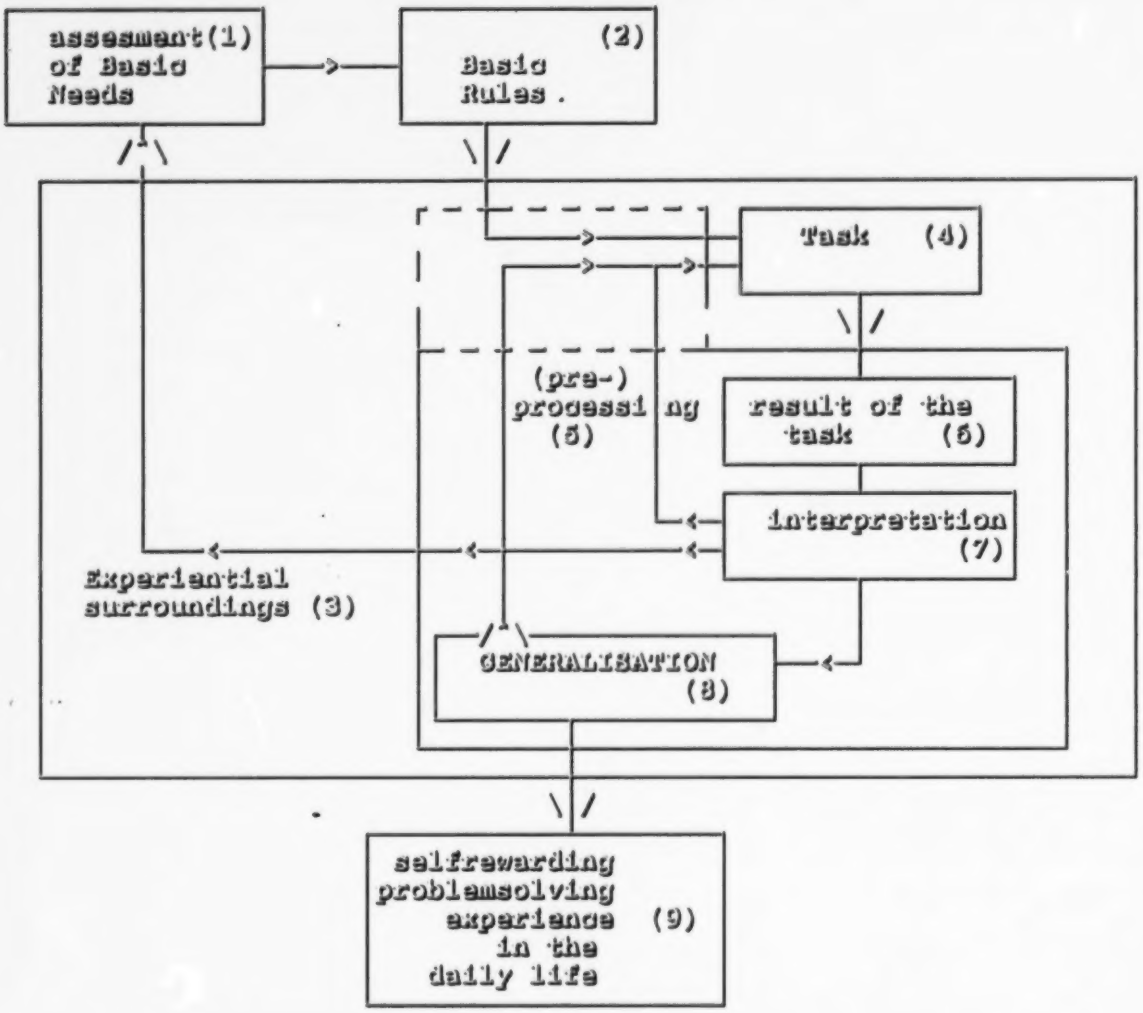
oriented most programs provide an experiential learning experience in which, after a diagnosis by exposure to a trek, individual aims are set and concrete new behavior is trained in as well adventurous outdoor (group) activities, as individual experience and problemsolving missions in the community. The program characteristics can be described as:

- basic safety by an empathic attitude, intimacy and a clear structure,
- ego strengthening by restricting non-perspective attitude and behaviour, looking for and appreciating the possibilities and identity and offering positive experiences,
- reality approach by a primary focus on community labour or activity to find acces to the experiential world of the youngster; talking may serve as a support to the proces of change and
- resocialisation by offering realistic and future directed possibilities.

To promote chances to develop and to change, live has to offer experiences and challenge. These are intensive and inevitable offered in on the institution and in outdoor activities and projects.

In the experiential model we use in residential treatment we try to take into account as well the individual as group aspects of the experiential process. The aims and tasks can be as well individual as group aims and tasks. The model shows a starting point and an ending point, but the model is cyclic and one is going through the sequences numberous times by which the experiential and change proces is intensified. The here shown model shows the basic concepts from the experiential proces is composed of.

SCHEME I



One assesses the basic aims and needs together with the youngsters. This can be done through an interview, a questionnaire of an activity, whether or not combined with a kind of psychodiagnostic assessment. (1) With this as a contract base, one makes some appointments about the rules (respectfull behavior amongst each other, the willingness to give and receive feedback, the promis to stay activily involved with the task, to act according to the safety rules and to be attentive (2)). The experiential environment is composed of a small group of people (so that interacting is inevitable and a necessity) and a challenging surrounding (in which tasks and interaction take place: Tasks in which one needs eachother in order to perform. Interaction leads to the proces of giving meaning to and deriving meaning from eachother amongst the groupmembers). These are the main source for feedback and grouppresentation. If the surroundings at the start are unfamiliair and challenging to the participants, It offers the facilitators the opportunity to act as a role model (3). The youngsters then start with a task in which abilities are needed that fit in the framework of meeting the assessed

needs (4). The outcomes is a mixture of result and appreciation and can be accellerated by pre-processing: the use of frontloading or methaphores.(5) and may vary from failure to a certain mastering or control (6). Then a shared evaluation of the proces and the results take place (7). Sometimes it is possible to generalise and what is up at that moment may be related to the whole (8), or to partial abilities. The result of this evaluation proces sets the tone for the next step: a new task. When there has been formed a stock of experiences, there is a possiblity to step out of the experiential learning situation and to step into real life with a set of self rewarding problemsolving strategies. (9). In some cases it may turn out, that the proces of needs assesment didn't cover the topics at stock; in this case one will nbe obliged to return to this point.

Generally we choose in our programs to follow the wave of the schoolyear. This means, that we take adventage of the fact that there is naturally a bigger in- and output of youngsters around the summer-holidays. Weekends and holidays offer an opportunity to programm experiences without interupting the schoolproces. For us this is important since we lay worth on continuation of everyday life in community during the treatment and this includes going to school or work.

SCHEME II

We start at the end of the summer holidays with what we could call an 'exposure phase'. This is an intensive 10 days outdoor adventure experience. Apart from developing a positive groupclimate, depending on the individual proces of the groupmember the focus is on diagnosis, self-discovery and experiencing or on experimenting with 'new' behavior. We guide this processes during different kind of outdoor activities. We take time for processing and evaluating as well during the activities, as afterwards. Selfdiscovery and aim development are promoted by the solo and keeping a personal journal. This personal journal is also used to keep on track during the year. This process can be compared to the adding of City Bound components to Outward Bound Programs.

Back at home in everydays life, at least one evening a week is structuraly spend together, to play together, to work out things from before, or to prepare new events. Sometimes special exercises or activities are executed; you may think of sport, games, theatre, acrobatics and, of course, outdoor activities. We like to work with the Project Adventure type of activities as permanently develloped and publicly shared by Karl Rohnke .

From time to time we spend a part of a weekend or holiday to take some more time to do activities. Central themes are personal and interpersonal processes and the promotion of personal growth. Questions that come up are: How do I deal with ...?, how do I handel what borders me?, what am I good at?. New personal actin theories are developed. Activities are thrilling or having an impact in several ways: the unknown requiers intensive attention or perseverance and emotional, cognitive, physical and will aspects are always present together.

Although the experiences are fresh, and in no way objectivily measures yet, we see so far a clear progress in the groupproces and some personel developments, which for us indicates we are on good track.

Over the last year however, SAC sees itself confronted with a group of youngsters, with whom they can not even start the routines of daily life any more. It turns out, that these youngsters live with an overwhelming variety of personal problems. School, work, social contacts, everything becomes a failure. In fact they have no life perspective at all: future doesn't bring anything.

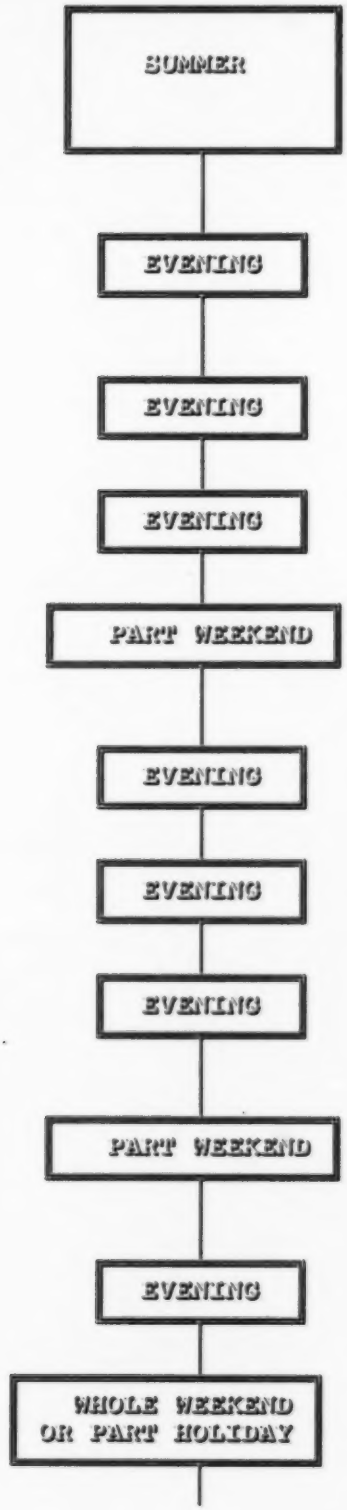
It turns out, that the usual programs to promote self-confidence and social skills are not a able to be of any help. Especially not if the progams take place in an open institution in the city, as in our case, in Amsterdam.

In order to overcome this difficulty we are developping a unique project in wich the start of our treatment-process takes place here in Czechia.

Here follows briefly pointed out what we are doing.

Last year we bought here in Czechia a piece of ground and some buildings. It is our intention to start over here a camping, a hotel and a restaurant. The whole set up, like the rebuilding, the improvement and the exploitation will, under supervision of our staff, be executed by youngsters. We will provide a intensive program in order to promote a regular day and night rithme. We hope to create a new feeling for a future that is worth living for and at the same time restarting the education by a combination of working and adventourous activities.

SCHEME III


SUMMER
EVENING
EVENING
EVENING
PART WEEKEND
EVENING
EVENING
EVENING
PART WEEKEND
EVENING
WHOLE WEEKEND
OR PART HOLIDAY

After this program part in Czechia, the younsters will return to Amsterdam, where they will live in a group-home for a period from about three monthes. They will be guides intensivily in order to put all learnings into practice in daily life. One of the other main points during this time will be to restore the relation with the social network wich has been severely damaged in most cases. For the next three to four monthes, there will be a possibillity to take part in a project for guided independent living, in wich the possibility for daily contact with a counselor is offered. After this last period the younster will live on his own, embedded in a restored social system.
During all these phases experiential learning has a central position.

We hope to be able to finance the extra expenses of the program partially through incomes from the activities at the camping, the restaurant and the hotel. As it works out the way we are planning it, the period of treatmant will be shortened from 2 years to about 10 month to a year.

One of the main issues is the development of a the training program for our staff and to learn them the skills of basic communication and processing the experiential loop.

Over the last five years groups of OC Michiel and the SAC (Woodrose) are involved in experiential education and the use of outdoor adventure. From our experience we believe in and see effects, but we still have a lot to learn. As well on the part of hard skills, as on that of soft skills. Both aspects will take time to develop.

At OC Michiel the resistance of staff-members and organisational problems turned out to be that big, that the program was stopped by the board. At Woodrose there has been a full turn over of workers, but there the program has its continuation.

The hardskill part is a matter of carefull practice and learning. In the softskill part we partially have adapted from the US and with this knowledge we develop a methology that fits for our culture and population.

Although it lacks in the Netherlands at the moment of a sound theoretical framework to develop the method, we are integrating the available knowledge to constituate a base for an appliable way of working. One of the ways we are doing this is in writing a manual, that will be published around may 1995. Besides that we are planning a multi-media course (radio/tv/book) and making connections with several colleges.

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